DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 918 SP 019 971

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TITLE Mainstreaming the Hearing-Impaired Teacher.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (Houston, TX, February 17-20, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Admission Criteria; Cooperating Teachers; Deaf Interpreting; *Deafness; *Mainstreaming; Partial Hearing; Practicums; *Preservice Teacher Education; Sign Language; *Student Teachers; Student Teaching; Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Disabled Teachers; *Gallaudet College DC

ABSTRACT

Recent changes in certification laws for special education teachers require some training in "normal" classrooms, a challenging situation for hearing impaired preservice teachers. Gallaudet College (Washington, DC) has been known for its teacher education program for teachers of the hearing-impaired. A new undergraduate program has been developed at Gallaudet College to provide training for hearing-impaired preservice teachers to prepare them for certification in regular education. The students range from those with moderate hearing loss who can function through either voice or sign language to those who have a profound hearing loss who can function only through sign language and some lipreading. The coursework element of the program is conducted in "simultaneous communication" (using sign language, voice if possible, and lipreading at the same time). For the practicum experience, conducted in hearing classrooms, student teachers follow the customary pattern of gradual involvement in the classroom through observation, subsequent analysis, and assisting the cooperating teacher. They then develop a specific personal plan for functioning in a hearing classroom. Strategies may include teaching their cooperating teacher and the class about deafness, providing mini-lessons in the use of sign language, team teaching with the cooperating teacher, or, in the case of the profoundly deaf, using an interpreter as a translator of the student teachers' sign language. Regular meetings are held between the student and the cooperating teacher as well as with parents and administrators, ensuring feedback on specific problems and successful communication. A college supervisor observes and critiques student teachers on a weekly basis. Gallaudet College staff members provide inservice orientation for cooperating teachers about deafness and how to work with a hearing-impaired adult. (JD)

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MAINSTREAMING THE HEARING-IMPAIRED TEACHER

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1982

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Problem

A physically-disabled college student residing at the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, California, recently chided a group of non-disabled visitors for their glib use of the term "Handicapped" in reference to the residents. He reminded them that a disability is only a handicap insofar as it prevents an individual from participation in society, and it just may be that it is the so-called "normal" people who are "handicapped" in their understanding of how well individuals with certain disabilities can function in the general society. Properly reprimanded, the group fell silent and thoughtful, and an observer could easily see that this student had provided an important insight for today.

Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., the world's only accredited liberal arts college for the deaf, has recently initiated a program of teacher-training which brings this philosophy into focus. To begin, let us review two points of background.

First, we are all familiar with the mandate of Public Law 94-142 to assign children with disabilities to the "least restrictive environment" which is appropriate to their particular needs. Although the term "mainstreaming" is not mentioned in the law, the result of the mandate has been to place many children with disabilities into so-called "normal" classrooms. Interestingly, however, while the law was explicit about a "least restrictive environment" for children with disabilities, it said nothing about teachers with disabilities.

Second, since the mid-1970's and especially since the state-by-state implementations of P.L. 94-142, state teacher certification bureaus have

increasingly required either full certification, or at least some systematic coursework, in "regular" education for all teachers who are seeking certification in special education. As a result, the theory goes, teachers of special education will not only have a broader background in education as a professional field, but also have proper preparation for working with disabled children in mainstreamed settings.

With these two facts as context, we turn to the Gallaudet program. For many years, Gallaudet has been known for its teacher-education program for teachers of the hearing-impaired. That program, at the Master's Degree level, has graduated teachers who are now employed in programs for the deaf throughout the United States and in several foreign countries. The graduate students matriculating through this program have been drawn from both hearing and hearing-impaired populations. For the hearing-impaired graduate students in this program, the transition from the program to a classroom of hearing-impaired children has historically been smooth. But with the recent changes in certification laws for special education teachers that require some training in "normal" (or, for this group, "hearing") classrooms, a very special challenge has arisen: How should this program proceed to give hearing-impaired pre-service teachers both background and practicum experiences in hearing environments?

One answer would, of course, have been to choose to seek waivers for these students and petition that they be given special exemption from the requirement. Another choice would have been to actively defy or legally challenge particular state regulations of this nature on the basis of their inherent unfairness to these particular people and on the basis of their

violation of these people's rights to job access under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. While both of these choices may indeed be made by individual students, Gallaudet elected a third option: develop a program to meet the requirement.

Program

The Gallaudet undergraduate liberal arts program, unlike the graduate program, requires that all students be hearing-impaired. In the spring of 1980, the College approved a new undergraduate Education Program within the liberal arts framework for Gallaudet undergraduates. The focus is exclusively on "regular" education, and follows closely the requirements needed for teacher certification in the District of Columbia Schools and the 30-plus reciprocity states who are in the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education Certification (NASDTEC) interstate network.

The concept of a regular-education certification program for preservice teachers who have particular disabilities is certainly not new. For many years, some hearing-impaired individuals have successfully obtained credentials as teachers through other "regular education" teacher-training programs; California State University at Northridge has for several years enabled hearing-impaired preservice teacher trainees to elect to do student teaching in hearing classrooms as part of their work toward dual certification in regular education and special education; a few individuals with extreme visual impairment have obtained certification and ultimately jobs in regular education; and the same has been true of orthopedically-disabled individuals on a similarly small scale.

However, the Gallaudet program for hearing-impaired preservice teachers may be unique in its express intent to prepare such a group for certification in regular education.

The program is the only undergraduate major program on the campus which has admission requirements. Each student is screened according to: grade point average (2.75 or better), written references from former or current professors, clarity of goals as expressed through a written application, and evidence of potential success and commitment determined from a personal interview with an Admissions Committee. While no screening process can ever be perfect, we know that this particular process has ensured that the admitted students have the best possible success chance among the application group. Of those applying, only about 65% are accepted.

The level of hearing-impairment among the students in the new program ranges from several students with moderate hearing loss who with amplification can function both receptively and expressively through either voice or sign language, to several students with profound hearing loss and who function receptively and expressively only through sign language and some lipreading. It is the latter group which presents the greatest challenge and who "raise the eyebrows" of hearing people when they announce that they are going to work in a "hearing" classroom environment. While many of the entire group will go on to graduate study in deaf education and will take teaching jobs only in deaf-education settings, a few may apply to teach in regular education and will make their contribution to education in either regular classrooms or in "mainstreamed" classrooms of hearing and hearing-impaired children.

A critical point of difference is found between the training experienced by a hearing teacher of the hearing-impaired and a hearing-impaired teacher of

the hearing-impaired. Both teachers have the same sequence of courses (regular education coursework and practicum followed by deaf education coursework and practicum). But the hearing trainees begin their training using media and methods which are in the same modality as that which they have experienced previously in life as learners; they are learning about regular education and practice teaching in a regular or hearing classroom. They then later move to the unfamiliar -- learning about deafness and practice teaching in that special education setting using media and methods (especially sign language) which are probably completely new to them. Thus, this training sequence follows the widely accepted educational principle of moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

On the other hand, the hearing-impaired trainees begin their training, again in regular education, with media and methods which may be in a new modality for them -- profoundly deaf people may never have worked or lived consistently in an environment which depends on aural communication and which does not use signed communication. When they later specialize in deaf education, they are returning to the familiar: they are learning about media and methods (especially about teaching in sign language) which have been part of their experience as learners. Thus, the deaf trainee in this sequence must not only adapt early to a new learning modality, but also must have an unusual commitment to becoming a teacher in order to survive the tremendous dissonance set up by this leap immediately into the unfamiliar, before returning to the familiar.

For these reasons, we can truly say that this group of preservice teachers are and must be special in a very special way.

What could a preservice program look like for such a group? The answer is, "highly similar to any other preservice training program in regular

education in the areas of early childhood, elementary, and secondary education." That answer means coursework in educational foundations and specific curriculum area methods, and a supervised student-teaching practicum with only hearing children.

We are by now familiar with the self-fulfilling prophecy dangers reported by Rosenthal and Jacobson in their research in Pygmalion in the Classroom (1968) in regard to teacher expectations of children. We must now apply that familiarity to teacher-training as well: if we maintain the same high expectations of disabled as of non-disabled preservice teachers, we will not be disappointed in the performance of either group.

The coursework element of the program has been relatively easy to establish because coursework in these areas, as with all coursework at Gallaudet College, is conducted in "simultaneous communication" (using sign language, voice if possible, and lipreading at the same time). But, what of the student-teaching experience in a hearing classroom?

A Least-Restrictive Practicum Environment

Herein lies the program's uniqueness because every effort is made to make this practicum experience the "least restrictive environment" for both student-teacher and children. The practicum experience has the following components:

1. Like other teacher preparation programs, the student-teaching experience is preceded by two other levels of gradual involvement in the classroom:

    a. Several systematic observation experiences, with subsequent analysis, in hearing classrooms;

    b. Several consecutive weeks of participation through volunteer teacher-assisting in a hearing classroom.

2. Each student is then held responsible for developing a specific personal action plan for the ways in which she/he will introduce herself or himself to, and then function in, a hearing classroom as a hearing-impaired person. The planning is individualized so that the student can tailor his plan to his own degree of hearing-impairment.

3. Students use one or more of the following strategies in their plans:

   a. An initial experience of teaching their Cooperating Teacher and his or her class some important facts about deafness, through presentation of visual material and (if the student is comfortable using speech) through verbal explanation.

   b. Some teaching about human differences and what it is like to be a member of a "minority" with an "invisible handicap."

   c. A series of mini-lessons for the children in the use of sign language. Children invariably respond with high interest and pride to these opportunities: as with the learning of new spoken languages, the young acquire this visual language with amazing alacrity. Also, some agreement is made about how the student and the children will be relying on other communication modes, especially visual explanations.

   d. Teaching in a "team" fashion with the Cooperating Teacher, with the preservice teacher taking responsibility for work with increasingly larger groups--a feature of most traditional student-teaching programs for hearing people.

   e. In those cases where the student-teacher has a profound hearing loss and where the student may not use voice, use of an interpreter as a "translator" between the student-teacher's sign language and the children's vocal language, and vice versa. For some children, it takes time to understand that the interpreter is only the "ears" and "voice" of the student-teacher, and not another teacher.

4. Continual and regular conferencing occurs between the student and the Cooperating Teacher to ensure feedback on the specific problems and successes in the communication process between student and children, Cooperating Teacher, parents, and school administration. Such regular conferences have again been a long-standing fixture of practicum experiences, but serve a critical function in this special practicum situation.

5. Weekly observations and critiques by a college supervisor, as is done with most teacher-training programs.

6. In-service orientation by the College for Cooperating Teachers about deafness and how to work with a hearing-impaired adult.

The steps in the student plans in item three above are the elements which have turned out to be the most critical to implementing the student-teaching experience for this special group of young people.

Attitude Study

We are presently collecting survey data on attitudes of parents, children, principals, Cooperating Teachers, and the student teachers toward this practicum experience. The data, when analyzed, will provide the basis for generalization about "mainstreaming" hearing-impaired professionals in many settings.

Establishing Practicum Sites

The success of any practicum experience, however, is linked not only to the teacher-preparation institution's efforts; equal responsibility must fall also to the practicum school sites and their personnel. We have been highly fortunate in finding Cooperating Teachers, principals, and parents with admirable openness to trying an untried program with the full awareness of the risks as well as the opportunities involved. Without their cooperation and support, this narrative would not be possible. In particular, we would advise that any institution planning to set up such practica must seek school professionals who have: (a) understanding of and interest in disabilities, (b) some prior training in special education, (c) openness to change, and (d) well-structured school curriculum programs. We find that where the conditions intersect (in a suprisingly

large number of public schools), then the ground is fertile for planting the seeds for this type of special practicum placement.

Conclusion

As with any new program which takes some risks, we have not found all of the answers to all of the questions and problems. Without question, the communication challenges for the profoundly deaf students who do not use voice communication remain high, and will continue to demand careful and individualized attention to appropriate placement and supervision. In addition, profoundly deaf individuals find another high challenge in developing strong written communication skills in English because they have not had exposure to the richness and subtleties of spoken English; and in some cases, their native language is American Sign Language which has a syntax that is different from English. At Gallaudet we continue to counsel and tutor students to improve their written communication skills in English, mindful of the virulent public pressure today on all teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers themselves have the "basic skills" which they will be expected to teach to children.

Why should we continue to try to prepare "disabled" individuals to work in regular classrooms in the first place? They face many barriers. A special 1980 Conference on Disabled Educators reported that they experience four types of barriers as educators: bias and ignorance, lack of communication by non-handicapped educators, lack of accommodation, and inappropriate counseling, but suggested that assertiveness has been essential in overcoming these barriers (McNett and Merchant, 1981, 34-37). Although today

very few professionals would dare to deny that disabled individuals have the right to an access to the profession in the "least restrictive" manner which is appropriate for them, the answers to this question of why prepare the hearing-impaired for regular education certification? One answer is that such opportunity is the right of disabled individuals under the law. We would agree, but that is not the whole reason. A second answer is that providing such opportunity is democratic in the sense of recognizing the importance of equality of opportunity in the American Way of Life. That answer, too, is valid, although condescending. A third answer is that providing a chance for disabled individuals to work with "normal" children gives those children an important experience with human diversity and can assist them in understanding the disabled in many significant ways. Again, we accept this as only a partial answer because it implies a type of exploitation of the disabled person. But a fourth possibility may be the beginning, middle, and end of the real answer: such individuals might just become top quality teachers of children, and that is justification enough indeed. With careful screening and advising, we believe that we can increase the probability that some will become top quality teachers of either the hearing or the hearing-impaired.

What lies ahead for teacher preparation institutions for working with disabled preservice teachers? Collaboration between the institutions themselves and school practicum sites will remain essential; as we have seen, it requires special people as teachers and principals to pave the way for a program that features some special preservice teachers. In addition, we must continue to exchange information between institutions about problems and successes in this arena--this is one wheel that need not be reinvented across the nation.

In the years ahead we should expect and welcome more and different types of disabilities to be found in our preservice teacher populations -- they could form a wellspring of talent that has gone untapped by our schools which so clearly need strong teachers. Our challenge is, "Will we really be ready to include such people in our programs, and will we remember to keep our expectations high?"

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